

Loss of a Second Critically Endangered Javan Rhino Points to Dire Need for Conservation Action

By Susie Ellis, International Rhino Foundation

Indonesia – The world's most threatened large mammal species, the Javan rhino, suffered another devastating setback when a carcass was discovered in Indonesia's remote Ujung Kulon National Park last week. Ujung Kulon holds the only viable population of the critically endangered species; no more than 48 Javan rhinos remain on the planet, and at least 44 of those are found in Ujung Kulon. Fewer than four animals of unknown sex and age may remain in an isolated population in Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam, where the carcass of a poached Javan rhino, with its horn removed, was found last month. This recent loss reinforces the critical need for bold action to save this species.

"These two deaths represent a loss of four percent of the global population," said Dr. Susie Ellis, executive director of the International Rhino Foundation. Javan rhinos persist in Ujung Kulon because they are carefully monitored and guarded by Rhino Protection Units, elite anti-poaching teams that patrol the park every day. While the loss of this rhino was tragic, the fact that its head and horn were intact suggests that it died from natural causes rather than poaching."

Shy, secretive creatures living in dense rainforest, Javan rhinos are difficult to find, even for seasoned rhino protection teams. Over the past 14 years, Rhino Protection Units have tracked the rhinos daily, usually by following signs such as dung and footprints. This intense monitoring and protection has essentially eliminated losses from poaching. Even though poaching has been eradicated in Ujung Kulon, Rhino Protection Units remain vigilant. Rhino poaching in



Africa has reached a 15-year high, and last month's loss of a Javan rhino to poachers in Vietnam is of grave concern. Rhinos are killed for the sole intention of selling their horns on the black market, which are used in traditional Asian medicine to reduce fever. Rhino poaching is a high-stakes, organized endeavor undertaken by well-organized crime networks that sometimes include corrupt government officials and foreign diplomats. .

Although the rhino population in Ujung Kulon has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years, the overriding problem facing the species is that there is only one viable population in one location. Thus there is still significant risk of extinction from a single natural disaster or introduced disease. Ujung Kulon and surrounding areas were decimated by the eruption of Krakatau in 1883, one of the most violent volcanic events in modern times. Anak Krakatau ("son of Krakatau") is still active, and the risk of another eruption, and the possibility of a resulting tsunami, still exists. There also have been a handful of rhino deaths as a result of diseases introduced by domestic livestock living in villages near the park.

"The death of even one animal represents a significant loss for this critically endangered species," said Widodo Ramono, executive director of the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia.

"The last photographic record of this animal, a male that had been frequently seen at a nearby wallow, was in March. Forensic evidence suggests that it died shortly after that time. The decomposing but intact



skeleton was found along a densely forested wildlife trail."

According to Agus Priambudi, director of Ujung Kulon National Park, "Scientists and park officials are working hard to learn as much about the population as possible. In December 2008, a track analysis census, part of a long-term effort to monitor the population, estimated the population to be between 37 and 44 rhinos. Another survey is now underway, using on-the-ground counts backed up by 60 camera-traps. This effort is collaboration between the park, the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia, and WWF Indonesia. Together, these data will verify population numbers and guide our management decisions."

"Because the park has no buffer zone, human encroachment has been increasing significantly in recent years," said Priambudi. "We are doing everything within our power to protect this fragile population. Along with our partners the International Rhino Foundation, the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia, WWF Indonesia, and the local and provincial governments, we are in the process of raising funds to establish a new conservation and research area on the eastern side of the park. This will expand the usable habitat for rhino and hopefully give the population room to expand."

"Rhino experts agree that expanding the usable habitat in Ujung Kulon is an important first step," said Ellis. "The next priority will be to establish a second

viable population of Javan rhino at a suitable site elsewhere in Indonesia as an 'insurance' population. This will be essential if we are to safeguard it from natural and human-caused disasters and to ultimately prevent its extinction."



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 <p>ASIAN RHINO PROJECT JAPAN SUMATRA INDIA</p> <p>Raising Awareness and Support for the Three Asian Rhino Species www.asianrhinos.org.au</p>		<p>Name</p> <p>Has adopted</p> <p><i>"Ratu"</i></p> <p><small>Estimated to be born in 2000, Ratu is an important part of the global captive breeding program for the critically endangered Sumatran Rhinoceros (<i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i>). Ratu resides at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park, Sumatra. The Asian Rhino Project and partners are committed to this fundamental breeding program working to save the species with science. This magnificent rhino is a valuable ambassador for her species!</small></p> <p>Thank you for playing such an important role in this program!</p> <p><small>Adoption Manager Emma Galbraith Date</small></p>